

# First record of Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* for Cameroon and Central Africa

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Un Chevalier grivelé *Actitis macularia* a été découvert le 12 avril 2000 à Batoké, Province du Sud-Ouest, Cameroun. L'oiseau a été observé en compagnie de Chevaliers guiguettes *Actitis hypoleucos*, ce qui a permis d'excellentes comparaisons. L'oiseau a été revu et photographié au même endroit les 21 et 22 avril 2000. Il n'existe que trois autres mentions pour le continent africain et il s'agit ici de la première donnée pour l'Afrique Centrale.

In the morning of 12 April 2000 we were birdwatching along the coast at Batoke, north of Limbe, South-West Province, Cameroon (04°01'N 09°06'E). While observing some Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos*, ML immediately noticed that one, foraging at a distance of c8 m, showed some black spotting on the breast and flanks. As this feature is a characteristic of Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*, a species that we were both familiar with, and we were aware of its extreme rarity in Africa (see below), we examined it in detail.

The individual was actively feeding, probing the vegetation and other beach debris. Several times it flew for c20 m, before landing again along the shore. It was relatively unconcerned by our presence, being approachable to within 8–10 m, from where we observed it with 10x40 binoculars and a 20x spotting scope. Four Common Sandpipers were in its immediate vicinity, permitting excellent comparison. Weather conditions were excellent, with a slightly overcast sky and sunlight either from our side or back.

Compared to the Common Sandpipers present, the most striking features included a dozen rather small, but well-defined, black spots on the breast-sides and flanks; a distinctly short tail projection, with the wingtip almost reaching the tip of the tail; the clearly duller and greyer overall coloration of the upperparts, lacking the greenish-olive tone of Common Sandpiper, with fewer, but bolder, dark markings; yellowish legs, compared to the greyish to yellowish-brown legs of the Common Sandpipers present; slightly, but noticeably smaller overall size, making it easy to relocate; and, in flight, a shorter and less obvious wingbar. We also noted that the grey patches on the breast-sides were not as clearly demarcated as in most of the Common Sandpipers, but this feature was not obvious. No clear differences were noted in bill length or structure. It remained silent throughout, even in flight. Its behaviour, including the wagged rear body, was similar to that of Common Sandpiper.

These features enabled us to confidently identify it as a Spotted Sandpiper. The following day it was found at the same spot, with six Common Sandpipers,

allowing further study. On 21–22 April, ML visited the site again, finding it in precisely the same area, although all of the Common Sandpipers had departed. It was clearly noted that the bird had acquired more obvious flank spotting. Several photographs were taken using a 400-mm lens (Figs 3–4). This record is the first for Cameroon and Central Africa, and second for continental Africa south of the Sahara.

Spotted Sandpiper has been recorded as a vagrant to the Azores, Madeira and Canary Islands<sup>6</sup>. In February–March 1999, one or two were found on the Cape Verde Islands<sup>5</sup>. Further south, in the eastern Atlantic, it is mentioned for Tristan da Cunha<sup>7</sup>. In mainland Africa, it has occurred in Morocco, with one in full breeding plumage in May 1995<sup>1</sup> and another in April 1999<sup>3</sup>. Finally, one was recorded in September 1999 in Kenya<sup>2</sup>.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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